



EXECUTIVE COMPUTING

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Two 'windows' open new world of productivity

Two spectacular programs for small personal computers — "Topview" from IBM and "Windows" from Microsoft — appear to have the potential to improve the productivity of everyone in your office who uses small computers. They do something called windowing, which allows you to run different applications in different portions of the computer screen at the same time — just as if you had two computers.

At first glance, the idea of having more than one program run simultaneously on your small computer — each in different "windows" on the screen — may seem like overkill. "Why," you may ask, "when I have enough trouble running a single program, should I consider having a second or third going at the same time?"

For business users of small computers, there actually are several important reasons to have this capability. In this week's column, I'll briefly describe how such a program might be used in an office setting, discuss some of the big differences between the two major products that offer this capability, and then offer my opinion of the best way to proceed.

Use of Window programs

Imagine this situation: You are processing a long report on your small computer when you get a call from a customer asking about their account. At the touch of a button, you can access your company's customer data base, which pops up in a small "window" on the computer screen. The customer's question can be answered quickly, allowing you to return to your work.

All the while, the report keeps running. You have avoided the process of logging off one program, loading another, and then logging off the second one and returning to the first one — a process that might have taken several minutes.

and interrupted the original report.

There are other uses as well. Let's say you are re-calculating a large financial spreadsheet or doing a lengthy data base search, both tasks that might take five or 10 minutes for your small computer. Do you just sit idly by or get a cup of coffee while it is being done? With a windowing program, you can assign a corner of the computer's screen to monitor that action while you go on to perform another task in another "window."

Not only that, with a color monitor, each window can be shown in a different color, making it easier to recognize different applications by their color — blue background for word processing, red for data base, etc. And if you want to move data from one window to another (to put a graph in the middle of a report, for example), it is relatively easy to accomplish.

Topview here today

These features sound impressive, and they are. It is now available for owners of the IBM PC (or preferably the XT with a hard disk), who are willing to upgrade to at least 512K of main memory (so that all the programs you use can fit in memory at the same time). At local computer stores, the cost is \$150 for the Topview program and about \$500 for a memory upgrade from 128K to 512K.

Microsoft's "Windows," on the other hand, is even more impressive than IBM's Topview. At a recent computer trade show in Atlanta, I spent some time reviewing a demo model of the \$99 program. It should be available for sale in late June or July. Here are some of the things I liked about it:

✓ First, it is said to use less main memory in the computer, allowing you more memory for your various programs. With Windows, you might be able to fit three programs simultaneously within 512K of memory, while Topview might only handle two.

✓ Second, it has a slicker look and feel than Topview. If you are like me, you probably have been impressed with the screen handling of the Apple Lisa (renamed the Macintosh XL before it was discontinued by Apple last month), but disappointed with the sluggishness of the machine. In that case, you will be happy to hear that Windows looks and feels very similar to the Apple Lisa and Macintosh, but it adds color and concurrency — the ability to run more than one program simultaneously.

In short, the IBM PC or XT with Windows is everything many business users have wished the Apple Lisa or Macintosh would be.

Windows here tomorrow

As often is the case with small computer hardware and software, just when you think you have it all figured out, a new product is announced that appears to be better than the alternatives available today. So you face the dilemma, buy an inferior product now, or wait to evaluate the new one when it finally is available.

Since the release of Windows is probably only six to eight weeks away, my recommendation is to wait. If it ends up doing everything promised, at \$99, Windows appears to be a better product at a better price than Topview.

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